The role of vocabulary in task-based language teaching in international and Iranian contexts

Parima Fasih

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3926-0830
parimafasih@student.elte.hu

Abstract

The present review of literature explored the role of vocabulary in task-based language teaching (TBLT). The first focus of the present paper is to explain different aspects of vocabulary knowledge and to elucidate the tenets of task-based language learning and teaching (TBLT). Second, the role of vocabulary and vocabulary tasks in TBLT is explained. Next, an overview of the recent empirical studies into task-based vocabulary teaching in international and Iranian contexts context is presented to address the research question concerning the effect of task-based vocabulary teaching on EFL learners' vocabulary learning. Based on the conclusions that are drawn from the previous studies, implications reveal how the findings influence students' vocabulary learning and teachers' vocabulary teaching methods.

Keywords: vocabulary; task; vocabulary task; task-based language teaching; vocabulary learning; vocabulary teaching

1. Introduction

The cornerstone of English learning as a second or foreign language (L2) is the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. Theoretical views have been expanded during the last decade or two to address the concerns more accurately about the nature of vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, scholars have proposed

some frameworks for the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in the field of L2 vocabulary study (Nation, 1990, 2001; Qian, 1998, 2002).

Nation's (1990, 2001) framework of vocabulary knowledge views the process of acquiring a word from the stances of morphology, semantics, and pragmatics. According to this framework, vocabulary knowledge includes knowing a word's form, meaning, and use. The first stage is to be aware of spoken, written, and word parts. In the second stage, there is a relationship between form and meaning, as well as knowing the concepts and associations of a word. Finally, in the last stage, we should know the correct grammatical function, different collocations of the word, and the frequency of word usage in different contexts. By focusing on the word form and examining the context in which it is used, the meaning of the word can be derived. Moreover, by knowing more forms of words and their meanings, the real-life conversation will be improved. According to Nation's (1990, 2001) framework, the three levels of vocabulary knowledge are inextricably linked. It is also obvious that all of these three stages include receptive and productive aspects. However, Nation (1990) acknowledges that this framework of vocabulary knowledge is an unsatisfactory categorization and that there is still more opportunity for improvement in future studies. Qian (2002) presented another framework for vocabulary knowledge, which is divided into four interrelated facets that are breath, depth, organization, and receptive and productive aspects of vocabulary knowledge. This framework is very useful for scholars to investigate the depth of vocabulary knowledge from a psycholinguistic standpoint.

The paper considers these two frameworks for vocabulary knowledge that consist of three components interacting with one another: breadth, depth, and usage of vocabulary knowledge, and explores the role of breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in task-based language learning and teaching (TBLT). Larsen-Freeman (2000) discusses the traditional, teacher-centered approach to language learning, in which learning a foreign language has been associated with teacher-centered methods, such as translating, repeating, and memorizing words and phrases, which were in most cases unsatisfactory. As a result of this teaching model, most students are unable to use the language outside of the classroom and in real-life contexts. Krashen (1985) also presented the input hypothesis, which argues that the traditional approach to language learning, which focuses on the memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary, is not effective for acquiring a second language. He suggested that learners acquire language best when they are exposed to input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence. Egi (2018) recently provided an overview of the traditional teacher-centered approach to L2 learning. He also discussed the traditional approach to language teaching and its limitations, such as the lack of emphasis on communicative competence, and the lack of attention to the learners' needs and interests. Egi (2018) argued that these limitations

led to the development of more student-centered approaches, such as communicative language teaching, which emphasize the use of authentic materials, active communication, and personalized learning. On the whole, there is evidence that traditional teacher-centered techniques such as translating, repeating, and memorizing words and phrases are in most cases considered unsatisfactory methods of teaching, as they do not provide learners with the opportunity to use the target language (TL) in meaningful, communicative contexts (Saher et al., 2022).

Recently, L2 teachers' teaching methods and techniques have been subject to change as a result of learners' desire to utilize English in real-life situations, and most of them now prefer more communicative approaches such as the task-based approach. Based on Prabhu (1987), who introduced TBLT, teacher-centeredness should be replaced with learner-centered approaches where the learners take different roles in all the stages of learning by performing a task in order to attain a communicative goal. TBLT makes it easy for teachers to control the students' performance and influence the process of L2 learning. Previous research studies have shown that TBLT has positive effects on EFL learners' vocabulary learning, an issue that is of considerable relevance to the present paper (Lu & Fun, 2021).

The following sections of the present paper discuss various aspects of vocabulary knowledge and theoretical backgrounds of TBLA. In addition, the role of vocabulary tasks in TBLT is explored based on previous publications. Finally, the recent empirical studies on task-based vocabulary teaching in international and Iranian contexts are reviewed. The empirical studies were chosen from trusted search engines such as Google Scholar, and Research Gate databases. The main inclusion criterion was that the papers have been published within the last ten years and contain the two essential keywords of *TBLT* and *vocabulary teaching and learning*. All of this was done with the aim of answering the following research question: *What is the effect of TBLT on learning vocabulary in L2 English?*

2. Different aspects of vocabulary knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the most important aspects of L2 proficiency, which contributes to a better understanding of speaking, reading, listening, and writing (Milton, 2013). According to Nation (2019), the knowledge of vocabulary involves different levels of strength, detail, and fluency. Thus teachers should develop students' knowledge of vocabulary by striking a balance between various language teaching methods. Additionally, Nation (2019) points out that it is not important to be knowledgeable about all aspects of knowledge since their importance varies. Breath, depth, and fluency are three of the most important aspects of word knowledge we should pay attention to. This said, it should be stressed that there is no need to develop all aspects of vocabulary knowledge in the early stages

of vocabulary learning. The most important in this respect are the spoken form of a word and the relationship between form and meaning as well as some fundamental grammatical rules (Nation & Crabbe, 1991, as cited in Nation, 2019). The following subsections focus on different aspects of L2 vocabulary knowledge.

2.1. What does knowing a word entail?

Knowing the basic meaning of a word known as denotation along with any subjective or related connotation plays an important role in vocabulary learning (Rao, 2017), but it is not enough. According to Nation (2019) to have a better understanding of a word, we should go through a cognitive process that entails exploring different aspects of word knowledge including "form (spoken, written, word parts) meaning (form and meaning, concept and referents, association) use (grammatical functions, collocations, constraints on use)" (p. 16).

2.2. Knowing the spoken form of words

When we come across learning new vocabulary in a foreign language while listening to the teacher or a more proficient TL user, we should quickly decode the sounds that do not exist in our first language and establish the knowledge of how sounds might go together in the foreign language. High receptive language knowledge helps learners acquire new words rapidly by recognizing and understanding consonant clusters, different collections, and acceptable combinations of sounds (Milton et al., 2014).

Learning sounds is also different between native speakers and foreign language learners. For example, in the process of learning sounds, understanding the distinction between open and closed sounds is essentially systematic for native speakers, while the positive and negative effects of the first language sounds are obvious in foreign language learners' learning (Best & Tyler, 2007). Much depends on the age at which L2 learning begins. There are various theories including maturational, cognitive, or emotional reasons that explain why this factor is directly connected to the learners' success in having a native-like pronunciation (Service & Kohonen, 1995). Acquiring stable pronunciation of words is important for vocabulary learning, especially for young learners because in the first years of learning, they will stabilize the pronunciation of vocabulary in their long-term memory. Older learners, however, can draw on a wider range of memory strategies beyond formal repetition (Schumann, 1975). Based on the maturational and cognitive theories of Flege (1981), developing the knowledge of foreign langue sounds that can be stabilized in the long-term memory is easier for younger learners. This is because physical changes in the brain occur after a certain

age and the first language system acts as a filter that affects the learner's new sound system learning. On the whole, the development of the foreign language sound system is related to incidental learning in which the learners engage in spoken communication where they focus on comprehension of meaningful input and the production of output. Naturally, incidental learning should be complemented with goal-oriented and deliberate foreign language sound system teaching as this can enhance the L2 learning process and help students become better at both understanding and producing spoken messages.

2.3. Knowing the written form of words

Although it is possible to learn other languages without learning to read and write, learners need to be aware of the phonology system of an alphabetic language like English and learn it carefully to have an access to the graded reading materials. According to Nation (2019), the formation of foreign language written forms occurs when learners participate in incidental learning and encounter meaning-focused reading texts, after which they are required to write or utter words and sentences as meaning-focused output. The process of language-focused learning continues when learners shift their attention to getting to know letters, irregular and regular words, colocations, etc. Finally, learners will become fluent in performing simple reading and writing tasks. Generally speaking, the development of the foreign language written form is closely related to the receptive knowledge of vocabulary items. Learners with strong receptive knowledge can learn the phonological system and recognize the spelling and written form easier.

2.4. Knowing word parts

The knowledge of word parts includes being able to identify roots as the main meaning-carrying parts of the words and progressive expansion of the derivational and inflectional affixes system (Tariq et al., 2020). Knowledge of the roots, which is a given for native speakers, is not considered an aspect of word knowledge for foreign language learners. Instead, foreign language learners utilize derivational affixes to help them create new words, but adding inflectional affixes to the same word changes its meaning. Prefixes and suffixes are the main types of affixes that help learners increase their vocabulary size (Wei, 2015).

2.5. Relationship between form and meaning

The most important part of learning new vocabulary by EFL learners is how to make a connection between form and meaning (Hunston et al., 1997). Firstly,

the learners need to recognize the forms of the foreign language words and make a connection between their forms and meaning by finding a proper meaning in their first language. In some cases, a word form symbolizes many meanings, but these meanings' inner sense is all the same. In contrast, there are words that are homographs, homonyms, and homophones of each other and each has a different meaning. In addition, we cannot ignore the power of receptive and productive knowledge of the learners that can help them make connections between different aspects of vocabulary knowledge such as antonyms, synonyms, and hyponyms (Nation, 2019).

2.6. Knowing the grammar of words

Another aspect of vocabulary knowledge is to be able to use words in different sections of a sentence, while speaking or writing, and knowing their part of speech. Paying attention to grammar has several advantages and knowing the part of speech helps to detect the role of the words in a sentence as nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and articles (Ellis, 2005). For example, if you know requisite grammar, you can distinguish between transitive and intransitive verbs, singular and plural words, and various adjectives. In dictionaries, the part of speech a word fits is normally stated in its entry, and the word's different parts of speech are specified by different examples. In some cases, when grammatical knowledge is related to a specific word, grammatical and collocational knowledge will be in line with each other. In learning the grammar of a word, incidental learning can be very useful and the learners can learn grammatical roles while the focus of teaching is on another point, and intentional teaching can be complementary in fixing the learned grammatical material in long-term memory (Hulstijn, 2013; Leow & Zamora, 2017). In learning the grammar of a foreign language, we should consider collocations that are a combination of words, formed on the basis of grammar rules but often used as chunks. In some collocations, the meanings of every word contribute to understanding the meaning of the whole, but in other kinds of collocations, the meaning of each word is not completely related to the meaning of the whole phrase. There are different kinds of collocation including idioms, figurative, literals, etc. (Nation, 2019).

3. Receptive and productive knowledge

According to Benjamin and Crow (2013), we should make a distinction between receptive and productive knowledge of vocabulary, because the former tends to be more extensive than the latter. In the process of learning a foreign language, you will learn many words during reading and writing and store them in your

long-term memory, but what matters is that the words can be used correctly in different contexts. Therefore, learners should know how to cultivate their productive knowledge to use the words correctly in speaking and writing. As Nation (2019) explains, receptive knowledge of vocabulary helps learners to comprehend a word when encountering with during the listening and reading processes, while productive vocabulary knowledge is complementary and helps the learners use the words during speaking and writing. Moreover, Benjamin and Crow (2013) mention the gradual process of increasing the productive knowledge of words, when you encounter them in different contexts and try to learn every point about them systematically. Receptive knowledge can be equated with the breadth of knowledge when you know many words but do not have the ability to use them. In contrast, the depth of knowledge develops over time when you have enough information about each word to be in productive control of it. We may infer that both the receptive and productive components are complementary and should be cultivated and developed at the same time.

4. How to develop word knowledge?

The role of the teacher is very important in the classroom because a big portion of L2 learning, including vocabulary learning, depends on the teaching method. Primarily, when the teacher shares the same first language (L1) with the learner, the difficulties involved in learning L2 vocabulary will be accurately determined and the transfer from the L1 makes it easy to grasp new words (Webb & Nation, 2017). In an intentional learning process, the teacher should select the most practical teaching methods to ensure that new words occur several times in different contexts. This is because, as highlighted by Nation (2019), learning vocabulary occurs across four levels of "meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development" (p. 24). The chance of incidental vocabulary learning will be higher if learners have access to a wealth of information and have the opportunity to generate language in both simple and difficult settings. In addition, through some unintentional teaching methods like task-based vocabulary teaching, students can make a connection between their vocabulary knowledge and real-world knowledge by doing different tasks (Ellis, 2006).

Obviously, not only teachers but also learners are responsible for vocabulary knowledge development. According to Sharma (2019), some basic strategies can help L2 learners to develop their word knowledge. Starting with some of the most basic terms is one of the most efficient strategies to enhance your vocabulary cycle. Looking up the definitions of unfamiliar terms in dictionaries and using flashcards, whether printed or digital, are two efficient ways to learn new words. Apart from

that, daily practice of the newly learned words and using them in your daily communication with others are also essential for L2 vocabulary enhancement.

5. Incidental and intentional vocabulary learning

Researchers have long emphasized the efficiency of L1 and L2 vocabulary acquisition through incidental learning that happens by engaging in listening, reading, speaking, or writing activity. By contrast, they were unsure about the efficiency of intentional, conscious learning through which fewer words can be obtained (Ellis, 1994; Nation, 1990). As a result, some educators and researchers have supported the adoption of activities and tasks that promote incidental vocabulary development, and they rejected intentional teaching methods that lead to purposeful vocabulary learning based on the belief that words learnt in this way may be forgotten in a short time (Krashen, 1989, as cited in Hulstijn, 2001).

According to Hulstijn (2001), intentional vocabulary learning is differentiated from incidental learning by its pre-learning stage since in most cases of incidental learning, learners are not informed of a future retention test. He also explored two main types of vocabulary instruction, that is, incidental and intentional teaching, in previous studies undertaken in the 20th century. In incidental learning, learners are provided with some tasks and materials without any educational guidelines and eventually they take part in an unexpected recall test. By contrast, in intentional learning, learners are supplied with some tasks and instructions as well as being informed that they would be assessed at some point. The result of the overview showed the efficiency of intentional learning over incidental learning, but there were signs of both intentional and incidental learning in the incidental learning condition. The reason was that the learners were presented with some pre-instruction and additional input; however, the assessment of their progress was unexpected.

Generally speaking, previous studies have pointed to the positive role of intensive reading and listening which leads to incidental vocabulary development and the only thing that is required is to significantly motivate learners to complete reading and listening tasks (Huckin & Coady, 1999; Hunt & Beglar, 1998). Moreover, according to Huckin and Coady (1999), when learners attempt to guess the meaning of new vocabulary, incidental learning occurs and this process will be accomplished primarily by lengthy reading tasks, but this is not the case with the most frequent one thousand words. Regarding incidental learning, Krashen (1989, cited in Alemi & Tayebi, 2011), also mentioned the importance of his input hypothesis in which reading tasks offer meaningful and essential input that contributes to learning new vocabulary and enhances correct spelling. In a nutshell, if learners are informed ahead of time that the provided content

will be assessed at the end of the teaching process, they may learn new vocabulary intentionally. If such information is not provided, incidental learning is likely to occur (Alemi & Tayebi, 2011).

6. Task-based vocabulary teaching

In the early 1980s, the term *task* became popular in applied linguistics. It is now a commonly utilized notion in both the design of second language curriculum content and research on foreign language learning (Ellis et al., 2019; Skehan, 1998; Willis, 1996). The concept of *task* can be defined as "an activity which is designed to help achieve a particular learning goal" (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p. 584). As this definition implies, language learners use authentic TL to perform an activity such as addressing an issue, putting something together, carrying out an interview, etc. Ellis (2000) expands on this concept, stating that when a task is provided, there is a relationship between the task and the real-world activity, learners engage in content communication, strive to achieve a goal, and their outcome is evaluated based on success in this goal (p. 196). This is what Prabhu (1987) meant by a *task* in his Bangalore project, stating that tasks are a suitable match for communicative language education since they increase realistic learning and encourage naturalistic L2 development.

Tasks are at the core of *task-based language teaching* (TBLT), which is defined as "a teaching approach based on the use of communicative and interactive tasks as the central units for the planning and delivery of instruction" (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p. 585). These tasks require productive conversation, interaction, and discussion, which help students to acquire needed skills in grammar through authentic language use. According to Lantolf (1996, cited in Ellis 2000), two distinct theoretical perspectives about TBLT are the psycholinguistic perspective and socio-cultural theory. In the former, tasks provide learners with required data for learning that influence the type of their language usage and possible learning opportunities. In the latter, performing a specific task is related to learners' behavior and various local goals that are constructed by learners themselves, so the nature of their language use and possible learning opportunities are difficult to predict. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), TBLT is an educational framework and an approach for second or foreign language learning. In the case of teachers, TBLT represents a teaching methodology in which teachers see the classroom tasks as the main focus, placing emphasis on goals, content and interaction. In other words, TBLT is not focused on grammar or vocabulary but tries to facilitate second language acquisition (SLA) in which instructors expect to generate real-life language use.

Task-based vocabulary teaching is an effective method for teaching vocabulary in a real-world context and has been shown to improve students' vocabulary acquisition and retention (Nation, 2001). Additionally, task-based vocabulary teaching can also improve students' communicative competence and motivation in the TL. To be more specific, task-based vocabulary teaching is one of the most helpful methods for enhancing vocabulary knowledge and contributes to a better understanding of speaking, reading, listening, and writing (Milton, 2013; Nation, 2022).

Since TBLT provides opportunities for integration of the four skills, adequate knowledge of words plays an important role during task performance. Therefore, along with concentrating on receptive and productive knowledge of the words which help to comprehend and use words when encountering speaking, reading, listening, and writing tasks (Nation, 2019), we should also consider some kind of direct pedagogical intervention. In this connection, a distinction is often made between focus on forms (FonFs), typical of traditional L2 teaching, and focus on form (FonF) instruction, which is a hallmark of TBLT (Laufer, 2006; Nation, 2019; Saeidi et al., 2012). In the former, teachers emphasize explicit grammar teaching, while in the latter they encourage L2 learners to pay attention to TL features in the process of communication (Laufer, 2006; Nation, 2019; Saeidi et al., 2012). In traditional vocabulary teaching methods, teachers use the traditional method of teaching and assessment, while in task-based vocabulary teaching they use different vocabulary tasks including communication in groups, problem solving, etc. In other words, in task-based vocabulary learning, both learners' receptive and productive abilities are drawn upon in performing different tasks. Previous studies have demonstrated, for example, that task-based vocabulary teaching is effective in teaching technical vocabulary (Nychkalo et al., 2020; Sarani & Sahabi, 2012) and nontechnical vocabulary (Khoshsima & Saed, 2016; Rasti & Vahdat, 2013).

7. The role of vocabulary tasks in vocabulary teaching and learning

While the significance of vocabulary task-based teaching has been elaborated on in several articles, the available research has on the whole indicated that during FonFs instruction learners focus on forms more than in TBLT, so their vocabulary knowledge is more likely to increase (File & Adams, 2010; Laufer, 2006; Laufer & Girsai, 2008). On the other hand, other studies have attributed learners' vocabulary development to the performance of vocabulary tasks in TBLT classes, showing that they are more effective than FonFs instruction techniques (Fuente, 2006; Kamalian et al., 2017; Sarani & Sahebi, 2012).

Previous studies have also explored the role of different types of input in vocabulary learning. Compared to traditional teaching which only included vocabulary

meanings, Dóczi and Kormos (2016) found that TBLT that focused on both meaning and context was more efefctive. In this regard, Graves, Baumann, Blachowicz, Manyak, Bates, Cieply, Davis, and Von Gunten (2014), stated that "both a definition of a word and the word in context, provide multiple exposures to the word, involve students in discussion and active processing of the word's meaning, and help them review the words in various contexts over time" (p. 335). In line with the previous study, Nychkalo, Wang, Lukianova, Paziura, and Muranova, (2020) explored the differences between traditional and task-based teaching methods. In the control group, traditional vocabulary learning methods were used in which the teacher presented the meanings of the new words and learners had to use them in context. In the experimental group, learners were provided with task-based vocabulary learning, and the types of tasks that they faced were working in a team, communicating with others and solving a real problem by presenting their opinion. The results testified to the effectiveness of task-based vocabulary teaching because of the active processing of the vocabulary meaning in context.

There are different types of helpful vocabulary tasks assisting in keeping the meaning of the vocabulary in long-term memory. Pattison (1987) lists seven types of tasks including questions and answers, dialogues and role-plays, matching activities, communication strategies, pictures and picture stories, puzzles and problems, discussions and decisions. In all of them, interactive language use plays an important role in maintaining consistent understanding of the meaning of words and allows recycling them in different contexts. Willis (1996), in turn, divides tasks into listing, ordering, sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks that are so helpful for vocabulary learning. He highlights the important role of language input in helping learners accumulate a stock of chunks that can be used in meaningful communication. Listing tasks are completed in pairs or groups along with discussion and in the end, learners will have a full list or mind mapping. Ordering and sorting tasks help students to arrange and rate objects, activities, or events according to certain requirements. Pointing out similarities and differences when performing comparing tasks empowers learners in the use of contrastive vocabulary. Problem solving tasks depend on cognitive and thinking skills, and help learners play with vocabulary freely in order to solve real-life problems. Sharing personal experiences tasks allow learners to use as much vocabulary as they want to express themselves without feeling any pressure of using vocabulary that they are unfamiliar with. Finally, creative tasks include listings, ordering, sorting, comparing, and problem solving. According to Nunan (2004), tasks can be classified into information gap tasks, which entail communication between people to exchange information, reasoning gap tasks, which are aimed to obtain new information from existing information, as well as opinion gap tasks, which involve recognizing

and expressing a particular choice, mood, or attitude of the learners in reaction to a certain event. Irrespective of specific divisions, the performance of tasks supplies learners with numerous opportunities to practice authentic TL use. As a result, they can learn many new words and save them in their long-term memory.

Aside from offering task-based techniques and practice opportunities for learners to get to know the meaning of new words, teachers should also provide suitable tasks to evaluate learners' understanding (Dóczi & Kormos, 2016). Bachman and Palmer (1996) distinguish between two types of such assessment: task-based and traditional. The focus of the traditional type is on assessing only one language knowledge area, while the focus of the task-based type is on assessing multiple areas of TL knowledge. When the traditional type is employed, the vocabulary ability of learners cannot be appraised meaningfully, because it is not interpreted against the background of the entirety of L2 knowledge. However, when performing task-based vocabulary assessment and utilizing various analytic scales, distinguishable ratings can be provided for different components of the L2 learner's language ability. Task-based vocabulary assessment is be beneficial for teachers, because they may become more aware of the issues they wish to assess. Bachman (2002) claims that task-based assessment may be utilized to establish expectations for performing upcoming language use tasks beyond the assessment itself and in real-life communication.

In view of the fact that previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of task-based vocabulary teaching along with task-based assessment, it is expected that learners will be better able to see progress in their vocabulary knowledge when they can successfully use new words in real-life activities. The following sections synthesize and evaluate the results of recent international and Iranian studies focusing on task-based and traditional vocabulary teaching in order to ilumminate the differences in the effectiveness of these two approaches.

8. Methodology

The study attempted to provide an overview of research on the role of vocabulary in task-based language teaching (TBLT). With this goal in mind, international and Iranian research articles published between 2010 and 2022 were identified from such frequently used Internet sources as Google Scholar and Research Gate. The key terms that were used to identify these research articles were *vocabulary*, *task*, *vocabulary task*, *task-based language teaching (TBLT)*, *vocabulary learning*, and *vocabulary teaching*. After that, the results of ten recent research studies were summarized and compared to shed light on traditional and task-based L2 vocabulary teaching and learning.

8.1. Empirical studies of task-based vocabulary teaching in international contexts

As stated by Bai (2018), finding effective ways of teaching and learning vocabulary is very important for successful L2 learning because, besides having good grammar knowledge, we should extend our vocabulary knowledge to enable better communication in the TL. Moreover, students' four fundamental language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are dependent on having good knowledge of vocabulary. International research into innovative approaches to teaching and learning vocabulary began in the 1960s by focusing on learners' beliefs and attitudes. The results demonstrated that vocabulary knowledge is more related to the ways in which vocabulary is taught and learner rather to some innate abilities. Task-based vocabulary instruction is one of the most attractive strategies that has captured the attention of many scholars (Ellis, 2003; Prabhu, 1987; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Skehan, 1998). It is an implicit (incidental) approach within communicative language teaching that was introduced during the 1970s and 1980s (Genc, 2004).

Recently, many researchers have compared the effectiveness of TBLT and traditional vocabulary instruction. The results of the empirical investigation by Putri (2022) showed learners' positive attitudes toward TBLT and indicated that the vocabulary learning process was enjoyable and interesting when communicative tasks were employed. In the next study, which was conducted by Huang and Gandhioke (2021), learners' manifested postitive attitudes toward vocabulary games and the score of the post-test showed an improvement in their vocabulary knowledge. In both cases, the researchers used TBLT which proved to be more engaging than the traditional method of instruction and allowed learners to challenge their vocabulary knowledge by participating in communicative or problem-solving activities, often having to work in teams.

In line with the previous research findings, Tachom (2021) emphasized the effectiveness of communicative situations in which learners have to retell stories. The results showed that using authentic language while communicating with others improved learners' vocabulary retention in the post-test. Nychkalo, Wang, Lukianova, Paziura, and Muranova (2020) explored the effectiveness of the task-based approach in teaching business vocabulary. In this study, the researchers used different task types for in experimental group during task-based instruction, while in the control group traditional vocabulary teaching and assessment were employed. The analysis showed that the task-based group performed better than the control group. Similar results were reported by Wu (2018), who was able to show the effectiveness of writing tasks in improving vocabulary knowledge. More specifically, the participants who benefitted from TBLT outperformed the control group in productive vocabulary knowledge. In comparison to the previous study,

the control group in Wu's (2018) study did not receive any instruction in the target words, which makes it difficult to generalize the results.

As can be seen from this overview, many studies have attempted to compare different types of traditional vocabulary teaching and assessment with task-based vocabulary teaching and assessment. On the whole, the results have demonstrated that learners provided with focused vocabulary tasks within the TBLT approach were more successful than those receiving traditional vocabulary assignments and teaching methods.

8.2. Empirical studies of task-based vocabulary teaching in the Iranian context

According to Borjian (2013), the history of English language learning in Iran goes back to the 19th and 20th centuries. The story of English language learning started with the travels of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar the first modern Persian king in the Qajar dynasty (1836-1925) who formally visited Europe, learned the English language, and brought it as a souvenir to Iran. After the Qajar dynasty, the progressive state of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) promoted English language learning and teaching in Iran and the English language turned to the first foreign language, which has been taught actively in schools and universities of Iran. The process of English language learning followed under the Islamic Republic (1979-present) and today English has become one of the most widely used languages of Iranian people for the purpose of study, immigration, and business.

From the first days of English language teaching in both new and old education systems of the Islamic Republic, traditional and explicit English vocabulary teaching methods have been employed. English is taught at a very basic level, for seven years at junior and senior high schools, for two to three hours a week for six years as one of the main courses of study. The main purpose of this English curriculum is to enable the students to understand simple texts by learning new words and simple grammar items, or to communicate with others at an acceptable level (Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Fasih, 2022; Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010). As is evident from the number of teaching hours included in this course and in contrast to foreign language education school hours worldwide, there is no time for innovative teaching methods in Iranian schools and English vocabulary tends to be taught in a traditional way (Ekstam & Sarvandy, 2017). For example, teachers use the translation method to write the meanings of new words on the board and students take notes, and there is no innovation in this respect, which is the source of many learning difficulties.

In order to confront such problems, researchers have conducted many studies in which they have contrasted traditional and TBLT techniques of vocabulary instruction. Moreover, in recent years, task-based vocabulary teaching has

received the attention of numerous Iranian scholars wishing to gauge the effect of task-based pedagogy (e.g., Fasih, Izadpanah & Shahnavaz, 2018; Fasih, 2022; Khoshsima & Saed, 2016; Rasti &Vahdat, 2013; Sarani & Sahebi, 2012). The study by Sarani and Sahebi (2012) found that task-based vocabulary instruction was more effective than the traditional approach. The study involved teaching technical vocabulary to participants using two different methods. The control group was taught using traditional methods, such as studying texts and answering comprehension questions, while the experimental group was taught using activities within a task-based framework. After thirteen weeks, a test was given to compare the performance of the two groups, and it was found that the experimental group performed better than the control group. In a similar study, Fasih, Izadpanah, and Shahnavaz (2018) investigated the effect of mnemonic vocabulary teaching on the vocabulary learning of students in two groups. The first group received traditional vocabulary teaching and the second group benefitted from a task-based keyword method. The results of the post-test showed greater gains in the performance of the second group. The researchers concluded that the keyword technique grounded in TBLT may result in significant enhancement of vocabulary learning, and this strategy can be used to modify the English teaching materials and curriculum in Iranian schools.

Another study by Rasti and Vahdat (2013) examined the effects of task-based vocabulary teaching including task-oriented video games. Similar to previous studies, the control group received traditional vocabulary teaching, while the experimental group was involved in a video game in which they could play with words and their meaning in order to solve a problem. The results demonstrated that learning through task-oriented video games had a significant positive effect on the acquisition of new vocabulary. Besides this method's positive effect on learners, we should also consider the teacher's ability in helping the students, because not all teachers are capable of using video games. We may infer that task-oriented video games can be an effective form of vocabulary instruction, with the caveat that teacher education programs should be developed to acquaint Iranian teachers with this strategy.

In yet another empirical investigation, Khoshsima and Saed (2016) stressed the benefits of task-based vocabulary training in comparison to traditional methods. The difference between the three groups involved in this study was that both experimental groups used a jigsaw and information-gap tasks, while the control group received traditional vocabulary teaching. Each session lasted 90 minutes, with 30-35 minutes dedicated to vocabulary instruction. After the instruction had been completed, all the students took a multiple-choice vocabulary test with 50 questions. The test measured the vocabulary learning gains of all three groups with the help of three sets of scores. The results showed that students

in task-based groups overperformed the students in the control group. The pedagogical implication of this study is that by engaging learners in problem-solving activities based on authentic materials can enhance the learning of L2 vocabulary. However, it should be pointed out that problem-solving activities require more time than is often allocated to English language instruction in Iranian schools.

As can be seen from this overview, the findings of the previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of task-based vocabulary teaching and learning in comparison to traditional vocabulary teaching and learning in Iran. Moreover, the results have shown that there is a need to reform the English language curriculum in Iranian schools, with a particular emphasis on the introduction of TBLT techniques to expand learners' vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, teacher-training programs should be included in this process by focusing on the vocabulary aspect to empower instructors (Fasih et al., 2018; Mansory, 2020).

9. Conclusions and implications

The present paper has explored the role of vocabulary in task-based language teaching (TBLT). To answer the research question, selected international and Iranian articles were reviewed and the results showed positive effects of vocabulary tasks in task-based vocabulary teaching on EFL learners' vocabulary learning. Task-based vocabulary teaching (TBVT) is a method of teaching vocabulary that is centered around tasks that require the use of target words in context. The use of vocabulary tasks in TBVT has been shown to have a positive effect on L2 learners' vocabulary learning. Specifically, research has indicated that TBVT can lead to better vocabulary retention and recall compared to traditional methods of instruction (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). This is because when learners are presented with vocabulary in context, they are able to see how the words are used and understand their meaning more easily (Ellis, 2008; Fasih, 2022). Additionally, when learners are required to use vocabulary in tasks, they are more likely to retain and use the words in the future, as opposed to when they are simply presented with words out of context (Nation, 2022). One of the key components of TBVT is the use of vocabulary tasks that require learners to use target words in a meaningful way. Examples of vocabulary tasks include gap-fill exercises, sentence completion, and word puzzles (Doff, 1988). Research has shown that when learners are required to use vocabulary in tasks, they are more likely to acquire and retain the new words (Al-Jarf, 2022; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). Furthermore, vocabulary tasks in TBVT can promote the development of learners' autonomy and self-directedness in vocabulary learning. When allowed to engage with vocabulary in a more interactive and self-directed way, learners are able to take more ownership of their own learning and develop a more positive

attitude toward vocabulary learning (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). On the whole, task-based vocabulary teaching that includes vocabulary tasks can have a positive impact on the learning of new words. The use of vocabulary tasks in TBVT can lead to better vocabulary retention and recall, promote the development of self-directedness and autonomy in vocabulary learning.

The findings of this study provide a source pedagogical implications related to how learners, teachers and materials developers and curriculum designers can benefit from the task-based vocabulary to vocabulary instruction. Moreover, in the Iranian context, stakeholders may organize training courses for Iranian teachers, which will help them with task-based vocabulary teaching in the future. This endeavor will need careful planning in Iran's educational system, as well as an increase in the number of hours allotted to teaching English in middle and high schools. Curriculum designers may also modify conventional English books used in Iranian classrooms by incorporating the tenets of TBLT (Fasih, 2022).

To conclude, in conventional teacher-centered English classrooms, vocabulary is typically not regarded regarded as a main and important skill, but by implementing a task-based teaching approach, this trend can be changed. Furthermore, students' language abilities and mental representation can be expanded by performing vocabulary tasks in meaningful contexts. Moreover, students are likely to benefit from task-based vocabulary learning in their learning process because they will identify their strengths and weaknesses and work on improving their shortcomings.

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